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ABSTRACT

This paper raises issues regarding two reports on improving teaching: the Report of the California Commission on the Teaching Profession, "Who Will Teach Our Children: A Strategy for Improving California's Schools" and the Carnegie Report, "A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century." A brief review is presented on the background and rationale for the reports and the broad recommendations they generated. Questions are raised on the feasibility of some specific recommendations made by the two reports. A bibliography is included. (JD)

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IMPROVING THE TEACHING PROFESSION: ANALYSIS OF TWO RECENT REPORTS

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There is an increasing focus today on excellence in all phases of education from K-12 to higher education. One of the central figures in educational reform is the teacher. Therefore, it was not a surprise that several reports dealt with the status, shortage, quality and function of teachers.

It is estimated that "between 1986 and 1992, 1.3 million new teachers will be hired (Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986, p. 31) and that California will need about 80,000 new teachers by 1991 (Assembly Office of Research, 1986). What contributed to the gap between teacher supply and teacher demand is the long history of low salaries for teachers, the growing interest of women in pursuing careers outside education, limiting teacher career upward mobility to administration, and two decades of discouraging employment opportunities which led many college graduates to select other fields for study. In 1985, the average attorney salary was $51,400, while the average teacher salary was $23,500 (U.S. Department of Labor, 1985). Clearly, teaching as a career has not been an attractive choice to minorities or to the ablest of college students.

It is the purpose of this paper to raise issues regarding two important reports on improving teaching. The first is the Report of the California Commission on the Teaching Profession entitled, Who Will Teach Our Children, and the second is the Carnegie Report of the Task Force on Teaching as a Profession entitled, A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century.

The California report was published in 1985 after two years of hearings by several business, civic and education leaders headed by Dorman Commons, a business consultant. It provides 27 recommendations grouped in the following three categories: (a) restructuring the teaching career and enhancing professional standards by, among other things, setting up rigorous entry and advancement assessment, a clear credential requiring a year of residency, providing advanced career positions, teacher sabbaticals and higher salaries and enhancing the mentor teacher program; (b) making the school more productive by reducing class size, providing sufficient space, materials and in-service training, developing and publicizing a biennial index of school conditions, greater participation of teachers in school management and intervening in schools at risk; and (c) recruiting able persons to teaching by making salaries competitive, instituting state-wide campaigns to recruit new teachers, especially minority teachers and providing fellowship for prospective teachers.

The Carnegie Report was published in 1986 under the auspices of the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy. Its Task Force on teaching as a profession came up with the following recommendations: (a) create a National Board to set standards and certify for the profession, (b) restructure the schools so that they could be more flexible yet accountable, (c) develop and use lead teachers to help their colleagues, (d) strengthen teacher preparation by requiring a bachelors degree in Arts and Sciences as a prerequisite for the Master in teaching degree, (e) calling on national resources to prepare and attract minority teachers, and (f) make teacher salaries competitive with other professions.

The Commons Report was hailed widely in California and several pieces of legislation were introduced as a result of it, while the Carnegie report was viewed by Tennessee Governor Lamar Alexander, president of the National Governors Association, as the report which "will define the structure of the teaching profession for the next 25 years" (EDCAL, 1986, p. 1).

From the caliber of participants in both commissions and from the texts of their reports, the zeal and vision of both reports are commendable. They rightly call attention to the plight of teachers, the need for restructuring our schools, the urgency for mobilizing resources for education, the priority for preparing, attracting and developing excellent teachers, and the need to encourage upward mobility within the teaching career. How could one quarrel with the goal of enhancing the teaching profession? Well, we need to take a second look at the whole notion of reports by commissions and the process of change, then analyze some of the "so called" reform recommendations being advocated by these two reports.

While having national or state commissions of civic and business leaders reporting on education and teaching could provide another view of the schools and their operation, several issues still need to be raised. First, the authors of both reports needed to elicit much greater and wider scope of feedback from teachers, site administrators, local school governing boards and teacher trainers in order to be truly in touch with pressing problems facing teachers in various local settings. Teachers' views of their status, problems, aspirations and the changes they would like to see implemented need to be considered seriously by anyone seeking to improve teaching. Second, the top-down model of reform suffers from the pitfall of lack of commitment and enthusiasm at the local school level. Educators see these recommendations

translated into mandates, rules and regulations without a thorough participation of all concerned at the site level. Even the Carnegie Task Force members agreed that "legislation cannot make teachers effective" (Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986, p. 90). To implement reforms, the persons affected by them should be involved from the outset in the process of developing these reforms. These persons should also have the freedom and flexibility to adapt these reforms to suit the unique needs and circumstances of their own particular school and their students. Berman and McLaughlin (1978) underscore the role of mutual adaptation in implementing educational change by providing teachers and administrators with options in meeting the needs at their own schools as they see them. Guthrie (1985) stresses the contribution of school-based management to mutual adaptation by emphasizing that the individual school is the essence of decision-making in education.

As far as the process of change, Olmask (1962) has identified the following eight approaches to the process: (a) political, (b) fellowship, (c) economic, (d) academic, (e) engineering (change the environment), (f) military, (g) confrontation, and (h) applied behavioral science. But it is evident, that change is more likely to occur when the group feels a real need, when they are involved in gathering data and seeking solutions, when they are in charge of determining their strategies for implementation, when the leadership is supportive of the change efforts even if they fail and when the resources are provided. Commitment, a sense of ownership and self-monitoring are very important ingredients to sustain the difficult tasks of innovation and reform.

Now, let us turn to some of the specific recommendations made by the two reports.

1. Making teachers' salaries competitive is a fine idea. The Commons report suggests a salary of $68,250 for a teacher with 25 years of experience for a 12-month salary and increments, and the Carnegie report advocates a salary of $56,000 for lead teachers. But where will the funds come from to pay higher salaries for teachers? The State of California is currently struggling to keep its budget under the Gann cap and the Federal government is also attempting to meet the Gramm-Rudman limitation. Local school districts are depending more heavily on state support. We need a radical change in our priorities. Neither report offers a practical plan for raising the enormous additional resources needed to support their recommendations.

The Commons commission (p. 43) admits that "improving California's schools will not be cheap" but offers only that California should reallocate existing revenues to finance the commission's recommendations and that people in the state are prepared to pay for better teachers especially if they see improvement in student perforomance.

The Carnegie commission also admits that "the cost of implementing these proposals over time is substantial" (p. 107) but call for state support, federal equilization grants to poor states and reminds readers that the benefits of spending more on reform would be reaped by all citizens because the improved educational system would contribute to higher economic productivity in the nation.

2. Furthermore, when the cost for more new teachers, adequate space and teaching materials, staff training and grants and scholarships is totaled, the question about the availability of resources becomes even more acute. To recommend reform without the necessary resources to carry it out, will stifle

the quest for reform and lead to skepticism, cynicism and disappointment. Many educators may see these reports as good reading materials but doubt if sufficient state and national resources will be allocated to them. A California bill intended to reduce class size was introduced in 1986, but failed because if its financial implications, and the percentage of federal expenditures on education under President Reagan is smaller than the one under President Carter.

3. While the yardstick for measuring reform is suggested to include student attendance, drop-outs, job acquisition, college attendance as well as results of standardized tests of basic skills, the main focus seems to be on the results of standardized testing. In California, the "cash for CAP" program until its repeal paid schools more money for student improvement on the California Assessment Program. Standardized test results are published throughout California as a demonstration of which schools and districts have done well, thereby earning laurels for some school officials and leading to criticism of others. Such criticisms have led some officials to resort to certain approaches to improving their students' test scores such as selecting easier tests, eliminating certain students from testing, test coaching and training students to be test-wise. Hence the results on even the standardized tests could be influenced solely bv these methods.

Related to this point is the Carnegie report's suggestion that teachers be rewarded for improving their students' performance despite the report's admission that "no method that we know of for measuring student performance and connecting it to teachers' rewards is yet satisfactory" (p. 92). So, how can

we determine which teacher should be rewarded if we cannot measure student performance and connect it to teacher behavior in the classroom? Furthermore, teachers and principals cannot be held responsible when the services they need are controlled at the district level.

4. Market approaches to the improvement of teacher performance, as outlined by the Carnegie Task Force include the offering of services for hire by board-certified teachers to the professional teachers responsible for a school, the contracting of services with outside agencies may lead to further disparity in quality among schools depending on their ability to pay for such services.

5. Similarly, when the Commons report urges the publication of biennial index of conditions for teaching and learning, should we not need to take into consideration the unequal resources available to each school? Student performance is influenced by many factors some of which are out of the control of the school. Also, the Carnegie recommendation that districts or schools at risk be eligible for intervention neglects to deal with the usual lack of community, parents and school resources to deal with hiring appropriate agencies and being able to pay for implementing their recommendations.

6. The Carnegie Task Force recommendation to abolish the B.A. in education and to require a B.A. in the arts and sciences of all beginning teachers has not created greater quality among teachers in California whose B.A.'s are in chemistry or physics as they taught elementary school children. What these teachers seem to need is a special B.A. that deals with the various subjects commonly taught in the elementary school, especially in the primary grades.

7. National certification and uniform minimal standards for teachers may be a good thing but we must guard against the possibility of a new bureaucracy.

8. Finally, both reports seem to emphasize the role of the teacher in the management of the school. Teachers are expected to participate in the leadership role and teacher committees may hire the administrators. It is important to reassert that the role of the teacher is to instruct and the role of the principal is to administer. We need to distinguish between advice and actual management. Collaborative decision-making is to be encouraged but the administrator is still held accountable for the total school.

In conclusion, the Commons and Carnegie reports have stimulated thinking and presented desirable visions. However, they have both overlooked the most important ingredient in implementing reform, namely, the direct involvement and input of a large segment of educators whose commitment, energy and good faith need to be cultivated and whose particular student needs and classroom circumstances ought to be weighed heavily in the formulation and the conduct of reforms of teaching. Furthermore, while their call for substantial resources to carry out their recommendations is commendable, the future does not bode well for massive increases in educational resources making the prospect of implementing many of their recommendations to be in considerable doubt.

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